Confucianism; The Principal Events of Confucius’ Life

Confucius’ life

- **551 BCE** Birth of Confucius into a poor aristocratic family (of royal Shang descent) in the warring city state of Lu (modern Shantung)
- **532** Confucius marries, and eventually has a son and two daughters
- **c531** Becomes keeper of grain stores
  - **517** Meets Taoist teacher Lao Tzu
  - **501** Confucius becomes prime minister of Lu
  - **497** Resigns after row with Prince of Lu
  - **497-484** Travels from state to state trying to advise rulers and gathering 70 or 72 disciples from all classes
  - **c484** Returns to Lu, teaching and apparently writing a history of Lu since 722 (Ch’un Ch’iu, the Spring and Autumn Annals)
  - **479** Confucius dies, leaving 20 books of short sayings (Lu Yu) among the Four Books

Confucianism

- **371-289 BCE** Confucian philosopher and Second Sage Mencius, born in Tsou state near Lu, also tries to advise rulers and is briefly minister in Ch’i state. He reinforces Confucian ethics of goodness by stressing moral cultivation in his synonymous Meng-tzu
- **298–c230** Confucian rationalist philosopher Hsun Tzu argues that human beings are born evil but can improve themselves through education and moral training
- **213** Confucian Five Classics survive First Emperor Ch’in Shih Huang Ti’s burning of the books
- **202 BCE–220 CE** Han Dynasty makes Confucianism into a state cult
- **140–87 BCE** Emperor Wu Ti educated and advised by Confucians
- **124 BCE** First imperial university founded to study the Five Classics and select civil servants (50 become 30,000 by 220 CE)
- **51 BCE** Emperor Hsuan ratifies official interpretation of Five Classics
  - **59 CE** Emperor Ming orders sacrifices to Confucius in all public schools, and sacrifices personally at the shrine of Confucius (72)
- **250 CE** New Confucian “Dark Learning” is more intellectual and sympathetic to Buddhism
  - **c600** Buddhism: Confucianism spreads to Japan
  - **606** Sui Dynasty sets Confucian-based civil service exam (until 1905)
  - **768–824** Han Yu asserts Confucianism is superior to and separate from Taoism and Buddhism
  - **960–1279** Neo-Confucianism movement under Sung Dynasty
    - **1130–1200** Chu Hsi’s prolific writings establish Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and Confucian Canon despite schisms
    - **1392** Confucianism becomes the Korean state religion (until 1910)
      - **c1506–29** Wang Yang-ming emphasizes the study of the individual mind, not texts, and is accused of heterodoxy
      - **1603–1867** Japanese Tokugawa shoguns adopt Neo-Confucianism
      - **1644–1911** Early Ch’ing Dynasty thinkers stress practicality, not speculation, and reject Neo-Confucianism’s dualism
      - **1858–1927** Kang Yu-wei tries to modernize Confucianism into a universal religion to challenge Christianity but is exiled to Japan (1898)
      - **1911** Chinese Revolution overthrows Confucian-imperial system
      - **1934–37** Chiang Kai-shek’s National New Life Movement tries to reassert Confucian ethical principles
      - **1949** Communist Chinese People’s Republic declares all religions “counter-revolutionary”
      - **1949** Mao’s anti-Confucian campaign versus military leadership and intellectuals
      - **1985** Estimated 150 million Confucians (U.N. figure)